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## The Cascade Stops Here

**A**lmost as fast as the collapse of the power grid came the culpability cascade from assorted politicians demanding to know who could possibly be responsible for such a disaster. Through the swelter, Canadian and American officials engaged in cross-border finger-pointing just as stateside politicians exchanged salvos. President Bush received the blackout as a "wake-up call" to fix the grid, though he made no vow to leap at a fine opportunity now accidentally at hand. This is the omnibus energy bill that, until the lights went out, had been a derelict vehicle for bad ideas, political gridlock and procrastination in the Republican-led Congress.

Dreadful energy bills have been passed by the two houses and are available for urgent conference repair when lawmakers return from summer vacation. For a true wake-up, we urge the president to put aside the ideological priorities that drive his energy policy — like oil drilling in Alaska — and lead Congress to deal separately with the here-and-now power problems buried in the bill's fine print.

Congress's penchant to prioritize the pork in omnibus bills should be put on hold, with the grid problem broken out as an emergency needing fast resolve. A raft of proposed solutions have been accumulating cobwebs for years as political leaders found no voter traction but serious regional standoffs on the issue. There is a clear need for more infrastructure investment, higher energy efficiency and far greater state and federal cooperation to enact mandatory, not voluntary, grid standards. A burst of political leadership, not blame-saying, would cut through the complex of government and utility factors that let the issue become stymied. The president should seize this role, but, alas, he already has rolled back improved efficiency standards for air-conditioners set in the Clinton years. Our leaders must not look for ways to postpone until after next year's election the controversy attending grid repair.

There had been no shortage of dire warnings from experts that the grid was fraying to the point of potential disaster. The pity is the warnings came with parallel predictions that leadership would be lacking until politicians were prodded by just the sort of crisis that brought down the Northeast grid.